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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INTERCONFESSIONAL COOPERATION IN TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

The following text of a press release regarding the 'Guiding Principles' was adopted by the U.B.S. Executive Committee and the Vatican delegation in London on January 10th. The release was made simultaneously throughout the world on June 1st as a manifestation of the spirit of Pentecost at work in the written Word.

Agreement has been reached on a document entitled 'Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible'. The document, released today¹ in five languages, is issued jointly by the Executive Committee of the United Bible Societies and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It provides guide lines for the increasing number of Christian Churches and communities which are working together with the Bible Societies in several countries to produce Scripture translations faithful to the Hebrew and Greek texts and also acceptable to all Christians. The approval of the competent authorities on both sides was reported at a meeting of the United Bible Societies Executive Committee with representatives from the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity held in London in January. At this meeting, where the Archbishop of York, President of the United Bible Societies, was present, Bishop J. G. M. Willebrands, Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, announced that Pope Paul VI had given his approval to the document.

These guiding principles have been the subject of extensive discussion and careful scrutiny since 1963. Three main developments in recent years have made the present agreement possible. First, the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council that Roman Catholics should cooperate with other Christians in translating and distributing the Scriptures. Second, the policy adopted by many Bible Societies that, in order to serve all the Churches, they shall also make available editions of the Bible to meet the various requirements of the Churches in respect of the canon of Holy Scripture. Third,

¹ June 1st.

the fact that Bible Societies are now providing helps for readers and non-doctrinal annotations in their Scripture editions, which also satisfy Roman Catholic requirements.

Although the agreement does not specify the types of translation to be produced, there is a common concern, both among the Bible Societies and in Roman Catholic circles, that versions of the Scriptures should be as far as possible in the living, current language of the people, and based on the best scholarship available in all Christian traditions.

DOCUMENT

I. TECHNICAL FEATURES

A. Textual

1. COMMON TEXTS

(a) *New Testament*: For joint translation programmes, committees should base the work on critical editions of the Greek text prepared by committees of scholars representing both Protestant and Roman Catholic constituencies. It is proposed that Roman Catholic scholars be represented in the preparation of Bible Society editions of the Greek New Testament including both the edition prepared for translators and the edition designed for more technical purposes. It is planned that this shall be a continuing work.

Though a critical text must form the basis of any adequate translation, it is recognized that conservative tendencies in both Roman Catholic and Protestant constituencies require that certain passages of the New Testament found in the *Textus Receptus*, but no longer supported by the consensus of modern critical judgment, be included in the text of the translation. In such instances, however, it is necessary that the textual evidence be marked in some way by footnotes or appropriate sigla. The extent of textual adjustment will depend, of course, upon the local situation, and will need to be covered carefully by clear and detailed principles (see section II).

(b) *Old Testament*: The Masoretic text edited by Kittel and published by the Württemberg Bible Society, being the most widely used by both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars, is recommended for use by joint translation committees.

In general, the Masoretic text is to be retained as the basis for translation. Where, however, there are insuperable difficulties in the traditional form of the text, scholars are justified in making use of the evidence provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls and by the ancient versions for other forms of the Hebrew text. New insights provided by related Semitic languages such as Ugaritic should be given due consideration even when they conflict with traditional renderings.

In view of the inadequacies of existing aids on Old Testament textual problems, it is recommended that a joint committee be designated to analyse the textual data and provide required guides for translators including the evaluation of evidence and a summary of scholarly judgment.

2. CANON

Many Bible Societies are in a position to publish editions of the Bible which contain the Apocrypha or the deuterocanonical texts in certain well defined circumstances.

It is recognized that on the one hand an edition of the complete Bible bearing the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic authorities will contain the deuterocanonical texts and that, upon the other hand, while many groups within Protestantism have employed the Apocrypha, a great majority find it impossible to accept an arrangement of the Old Testament which does not clearly distinguish between these texts and the traditional Hebrew canon. It is suggested that these two positions can in practice be reconciled if normally, in editions of the Bible published by the Bible Societies and bearing the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic authorities, the deuterocanonical texts are included as a separate section before the New Testament. In the case of the book of Esther the translation of the Greek text will be printed in the deuterocanonical section while the translation of the Hebrew text will be printed among the books of the Hebrew canon. The deuterocanonical parts of the book of Daniel will be presented as items in the separate section.

B. Exegetical

1. EXEGESIS

In view of the growing agreement between scholars of both Roman Catholic and Protestant backgrounds a common exegetical basis should be established by the adoption of mutually acceptable commentaries and critical studies recommended by a joint commission.

2. ANNOTATIONS OR HELPS FOR READERS

Both the needs of the reader and the traditional requirements of the Church can be satisfied with the following types of annotations:

(a) *Alternative readings*: those meaningfully significant differences of reading which merit notice, or those readings for which manuscript evidence is both limited and late.

(b) *Alternative renderings*: different interpretations based either on ambiguities in the original language or alternative means of expression in the receptor language.

(c) *Explanation of proper names*: literal renderings of proper names when the message turns on an identification of the so-called etymology, e.g. Isaac, Israel, Jesus (at certain crucial points in the text). (These explanations of proper names are essentially similar to 'plays on words' but are here treated as a separate category because of their peculiar nature and widespread occurrence.)

(d) *Plays on words*: the identification of related forms in the original languages, e.g. *pneuma* meaning both 'spirit' and 'wind' (John 3).

(e) *Historical backgrounds*: brief identification of historical individuals, places and events which are related to so-called 'secular history'. Much of

this information may be given in the form of maps (with ancient and modern nomenclature) and short explanations provided in a Bible index.

(f) *Cultural differences*: explanations of social, religious, or cultural terms:

- (i) individuals or groups, e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc.;
- (ii) objects of radically different form and function, e.g. weights and measures (weights, measures and coins must often be explained if a text is to be meaningful);
- (iii) Biblical customs, e.g. 'being seated on the right hand' must be explained as implying distinction and honour when in certain societies the 'left hand' is the preferred location.

(g) *Cross references*: the listing of other passages (with identificational annotations) involving parallel content, similar historical events, quotations, clear cases of allusion, and parallel treatment of subject matter. While reference systems always run the risk of subjectivity and some are outright tendentious, nevertheless it has been possible to prepare reference systems of great usefulness and scholarly objectivity.

(h) *Section headings*: the placing of identificational phrases as titles for significant sections. Readers are increasingly requesting the use of section headings in the text to facilitate location of passages, to indicate where a particular narrative or discourse begins, and to break up the otherwise heavy page of type. Such headings must be set off from the text by location and contrastive type face, should in so far as possible consist of words or phrases from the text, and should be identificational rather than interpretative.

Some committees have considered the possibility of explaining different Roman Catholic and Protestant beliefs by noting that one interpretation is held by Roman Catholics and another by Protestants. Such a procedure does not seem wise, for it tends to accentuate differences; nor is it necessary, for most diversities of interpretation can be covered more objectively by marginal annotations on alternative renderings, if the issue in question is important. Where the matter is not of great consequence, it is better simply to omit reference in the interest of joint undertakings.

Most annotations of helps for readers considered above are located on the specific page in the text where the difficulty arises, but if such a note would occur frequently it is often more satisfactory to summarize the data in tables of weights and measures or glossaries of difficult terms.

Restrictions on the types of annotations in no way preclude Roman Catholic and Protestant constituencies from publishing commentaries as separate volumes to help the reader to understand and appreciate more fully the nature and significance of the Holy Scriptures in the light of their own tradition.

3. SUPPLEMENTARY FEATURES

The addition of certain other features such as index, concordance, maps, illustrations, etc., may be considered for certain types of publications.

Though practically all Bibles are printed with a table of contents listing the books of the Bible, an increasing number are also printed with brief

indices which aid the reader in finding specific passages. A concordance from 25,000 to 45,000 lines, for instance, may also be highly useful in encouraging the study of principal Bible themes. Maps have been standard in reference Bibles for many years.

Illustrations pose more complex problems than any other supplementary feature, for there are many different concepts of what is artistic and diverse views as to what is appropriate for the Bible. Furthermore, what is aesthetically pleasing and historically meaningful in one culture may be grossly misunderstood in another. One general tendency, however, is now evident in most illustrations employed in the Scriptures; rather than use merely 'decorative pictures' of dubious artistic merit and only passing relevance, publishers are responding to an evident desire on the part of people for pictures which will either provide background information or promote a measure of psychological identification and involvement because of the symbolic and dramatic character of the illustration.

To serve the purpose of joint Roman Catholic and Protestant editions, a preface, if desirable, should be restricted to a commendation of the Holy Scriptures to the reader and should omit appeals to ecclesiastical authority.

It is not normally the practice of the Bible Societies to associate the names of translators or revisers with translations of the Scriptures.

C. Linguistic

1. ORTHOGRAPHY

Where Roman Catholic and Protestant constituencies employ different systems of spelling, these must be resolved by the employment of carefully developed scientific principles before any significant steps toward a common translation of the Scriptures can be realized.

Orthographic differences in the mission field are relatively widespread. They have resulted from different language backgrounds and linguistic orientations of early missionaries. Changes in such systems cannot be easily made, but given a significant measure of goodwill and a concern for Christian unity and educational efficiency, it is possible to work out practical solutions. At the same time, it is recognized that the problems of orthography are not merely linguistic but are largely ethno-linguistic. Cultural factors, such as conformity to a prestige language, and the psychological elements of efficiency and rapid reading are often far more important than purely linguistic (or phonemic) considerations.

2. PROPER NAMES

Agreement must be reached on the forms of proper names before any joint text can be adopted or any joint translation undertaken. Factors which complicate such agreement are:

(a) the traditional use by Roman Catholics of Latin forms as a basis for transliteration, even including certain inflected forms of Latin words;

(b) Protestant use of European languages as a basis for transliteration, most commonly English;

(c) the dominance of local, national, or trade languages, e.g. French,

Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili, in contrast to systems employed by Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries;

(d) the attachment to particular forms of proper names as symbols of religious difference (forms of names have often been employed as a 'badge of distinction');

(e) the essentially arbitrary nature of the differences in transliteration, so that no one solution is overwhelmingly superior.

In the case of major languages with relatively long traditions, differences of usage can be resolved by following more closely the Greek and Hebrew forms with two major exceptions: (a) Old Testament persons referred to in the New Testament should have the Old Testament forms of names, and (b) certain widely known forms of names may be so deeply embedded in popular or local usage that they cannot be readily changed.

3. BORROWINGS

Borrowings of terms (other than proper names), e.g. words for 'grace', should be kept at a minimum, since words not already used in the receptor language are empty terms. But if borrowing is regarded as necessary, it should generally be from living languages rather than ancient ones.

Borrowing is of two major types: (a) terms borrowed in the past by normal linguistic processes and often completely absorbed, in which case they are really a part of the vocabulary of the living language, and (b) terms expressly introduced for the first time in Bible translations. These latter types of borrowing are the ones treated here.

Roman Catholics and Protestants have exhibited two rather distinct tendencies in borrowing. For the most part, Roman Catholics have borrowed largely from Latin, while Protestants have borrowed from Greek, Hebrew or modern European languages, with theological terms coming from Greek and Hebrew and cultural terms from European languages.

For major languages borrowing should be kept at a strict minimum, for all such languages have a sufficiently large vocabulary or phrasal equivalence to make borrowing relatively unnecessary. For minor languages borrowing should be made from those major living languages from which languages in question normally appropriate such terms as may be required by expanding technology, commerce, and social intercourse.

4. STYLE OF LANGUAGE

Any joint Roman Catholic and Protestant translation should aim at a style of language which would be both meaningful and readable in public. It must make sense to those both within and outside the church and be in a language reflecting current usage but sufficiently dignified to be fitting for the importance of the message.

It is wrong to assume that only one legitimate type of translation in major world languages is required. Although it is increasingly less necessary to prepare different translations for diverse geographical dialects, many languages include significant socio-economic or ethnic dialects. Such diversity of

language and corresponding differences of purpose in translation suggest that more than one style of language may not only be desirable but necessary in many situations.

II. PROCEDURES

Procedures will differ radically, depending upon the nature of the project (a new translation or revision), upon the level of training and education of the constituency, upon whether the psychological climate is conducive to cooperation, and upon the adherence of one or another constituency to its distinctive traditions. In all tasks at least certain of the following procedural factors figure significantly in the development of a programme.

A. Climate for Cooperation

Whether a revision or new translation can be undertaken jointly in a particular area depends largely upon the climate established by the respective constituencies.

The strategic importance of the psychological attitudes of the constituencies involves a basic policy of the Bible Societies, which, though they generally hold the publishing rights for the Scriptures, only do so on behalf of the churches. Therefore, any cooperative undertaking will need for its success as wide an agreement as is possible on the part of the constituencies concerned.

B. Revision vs. New Translation

In general, it is preferable to undertake a new translation rather than attempt a revision of an existing text.

Where Roman Catholics wish to use existing Protestant versions without modification or with such slight changes as to be wholly acceptable to the Protestant constituency, there are usually few if any problems. Similarly, Protestants may wish to use certain Roman Catholic translations on similar bases. However, any serious attempt at revision of existing texts often results in a series of difficulties. It would seem far better where time and circumstances permit, to make a new translation. This makes possible the avoidance of traditional attachments, provides freedom to adopt new forms of language and a more relevant style, demonstrates a real and working ecumenicity, and provides both psychological and scholarly bases for creative decisions.

C. Organizational Structure

For the most adequate development of a translation programme, there is need for three groups: (1) a Working Committee, (2) a Review Committee, and (3) a Consultative Group.

1. WORKING COMMITTEE

Consisting of 4 to 6 persons equally divided between Protestant and Roman Catholic constituencies and possessing four essential characteristics:

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| (a) equal standing, | (c) mutual respect, and |
| (b) complementary abilities, | (d) capacity to work together. |

Moreover, it is essential that these persons have the opportunity to give sufficient time to the work, for their goodwill must be matched by the opportunity afforded to carry out the programme (members of working panels have sometimes been assigned tasks without adequate provision being made for their being able to carry through such projects).

2. REVIEW COMMITTEE

Consisting of from 8 to 10 persons specially qualified to make scholarly study of the text, exegesis and style. On such a committee Roman Catholic and Protestant constituencies should be equally represented. The members should make their contribution largely by correspondence, though for certain key issues they may be invited to sit with the Working Committee.

3. CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Consisting of 25 to 50 persons, depending upon the language and circumstances, selected not primarily for their technical competence but for their position as church leaders and their being representative of different constituencies: ecclesiastical, political, and geographical. The members provide their assistance entirely through correspondence.

For major languages a double structure is required, one for the New Testament and the other for the Old Testament, and in many circumstances a secretary is essential if the work is to be properly coordinated and decisions adequately recorded.

D. Appointment of Personnel

Working and Review Committees should be selected very carefully after full consultation with all leaders involved, while the members of the Consultative Group may be named by their respective constituencies.

To find the most qualified persons to constitute the Working and Review Committees, it is necessary to use informal decision-making structures. That is to say, an extensive investigation is made by some qualified individuals so as to assess the technical capacities and the probabilities of such persons being able to work together effectively in a committee. After determination, in consultation with church leaders, of the availability of such individuals, they may be formally nominated by their respective churches and appointed by the Bible Societies. Without careful preliminary investigation unsuitable appointments have sometimes been made to the detriment of the whole project.

E. Formulation of Principles

To provide proper guidance to a programme, to ensure consistency of the results, and to make possible creative collective efforts, detailed principles must be worked out covering the entire range of technical features, e.g. text to be used, exegetical bases, system of transliteration, level of style, etc.

Adequate formulations of principles provide the best guarantee of success of a translation or revision project. In the first place, adherence to such principles provides the most satisfactory answer to the problems of 'authority',

for once the principles are agreed upon and accepted by the leaders of the respective constituencies, the translators can proceed with a high measure of assurance that the work will be accepted. In the second place, formulation of such principles makes possible the avoidance of a number of psychological problems, since those concerned may argue for or against the principles rather than for and against each other. Furthermore, principles are a significant aid in the production of greater consistency in the translation, for even in instances where some principle needs to be changed as a result of later experience in the work, all previous materials can be adjusted in keeping with such an alteration of principles, so that the resulting work may be basically uniform.

F. Editorial Supervision

It is essential that someone take the responsibility for 'editorial supervision'.

Such supervision, however, does not necessarily entail constant 'watching' of the work, but rather provides a means by which the translators may have from a competent Bible Society source some guidance as to ways of solving those problems which may have arisen during the course of the work. Moreover, the possibility of such consultation provides a method for eliminating pressures which may build up when there is no such 'neutral referee' to which to turn. The mere fact that such consultation is available, either with Bible Society Translations Departments or their Field Representatives, often prevents tensions and the development of strained relations.

G. Types of Editions

If joint translation programmes are to lead to meaningful unity in the preparation of editions of the Holy Scriptures, it is important to avoid the production of two different texts (Roman Catholic and Protestant) by two different publishing houses.

If the result of joint effort is merely to produce two different texts to be put out by different publishers, it is almost inevitable that within five to ten years the texts will be further changed and ultimately there will be two different Bibles rather than one joint production. Even when the same text is put out by two different publishers it can become the object of very considerable pressure for minor modifications which within a short time add up to major changes. This does not mean, of course, that there should be only one edition of the Scriptures containing precisely the same supplementary or marginal helps, for a variety of forms of one and the same text can be useful in reaching diverse parts of a constituency. Nevertheless, once an agreement has been made as to a united approach to a translation or revision, it is wise to foresee the need of implementing this unity by continued procedures in publication.

H. Imprint and Imprimatur

An edition prepared jointly by Roman Catholics and Protestants would normally bear the imprint of the Bible Society and the imprimatur of the appropriate Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority.

The most appropriate form for such an edition published by the Bible Societies would be for the Bible Society imprint to occur on the title page and the imprimatur of the appropriate Roman Catholic authority on the back of the title page, this being the normal procedure for books properly authorized by the Roman Catholic Church.

ISIDORE DE SOUZA

PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS UNITE TO TRANSLATE THE WORD OF GOD

This article first appeared in French in Afrique et Parole, No. 20, June 30, 1967, and has been translated by Dr Heber F. Peacock. We believe that many of our readers will be glad to read this account of a joint translation project written by a Roman Catholic participant for a periodical circulating largely among Roman Catholics, whose editor has kindly given consent for its reproduction here. Ed.

Birth of the project

The translation of the Bible into Fon, now in progress in South Dahomey, is in my opinion an example of the providential action of God. In fact, a number of providential events converged at its beginning. On one hand, the Ecumenical Council produced a thaw in Catholic-Protestant relations and created a favorable atmosphere for a joint project. Ten or twenty years ago it would have been unthinkable. The Bible had been translated into other languages of Dahomey: Nago, Gun, and in part Mina. But these translations, completed more or less successfully, were the work of our separated brethren alone. This is not the case with the translation now in progress. It is being done jointly, as a result of the favorable conditions created by Vatican II.

On the other hand, the Synod of the Methodist Church, held in Porto-Novo, Dahomey in January 1966, decided, among other things, to proceed with an intensification of a program of evangelization among the Fon, only a few of whom had been reached until then. As everyone knows, the Word of God constitutes the basic element of the Protestant pastoral ministry. But neither the Protestants nor the Catholics possess a systematic translation of the Bible into Fon. The Synod decided to begin one. Desirous of eliminating duplication of effort and moved by an ecumenical spirit, the Synod agreed that the translation should be made jointly with the Catholics.

Contact was then established and conversations begun between Pastor Lewis (Cotonou) and the Abbé Michel Dujarrier (College Aupiais, Cotonou), who obtained the general agreement of Monseigneur Gantin, Archbishop of Cotonou. After the first contacts had been made, a meeting was organized for February 10, 1966, at the home of Pastor Wood in Cotonou. Pastors and priests who might possibly be interested in the project and able to